

Ritual as assemblage: feast of sacrifice experiences of Turkish consumers

476

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to theorize and empirically investigate the formation of consumer's consumption ritual experiences and discourses associated with Feast of Sacrifice.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors have approached the data from assemblage theory perspective. By use of ethnographic participant observation and in-depth interviews, seven themes are uncovered and discussed: meaning of Qurban, preparation of the ritual, Qurban choice, meat, Qurban ritual, marketplace and framing of discourses.

Findings – This study provides a theoretical development in which it depicts that assemblage theory can be used in the context of religious rituals such as the Feast of Sacrifice. This suggests that parts forming the social phenomena include different meanings and functions in different assemblages to the ritual, which has a structure with a particular process, roles and content scenario. This implies that even the most structured social phenomena as religious rituals can be accepted as social assemblage where every individual experiences his/her own ritual with the parts that have ever-changing material and expressive roles.

Originality/value – This study will contribute to the literature on religious rituals and practices through viewing ritual as an assemblage including material and expressive features as well as human and non-human actors. Besides, this study aims to find out whether there is a constant consumer and the concept of ritual by focusing on buying experiences of consumer in Feast of Sacrifice in Turkey.

Keyword The Muslim consumption pattern

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Rituals are processes that guide our everyday life and in which we have tested different consumption actions. Rook (1985, p. 252) defines ritual as “a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time.” McCracken (1986) classified rituals based on meaning

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transfer from goods to consumers as exchange, possession, grooming and divestment. There are some sacred rituals like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Ramadan and Feast of Sacrifice. Some studies asserted that these have started to be commercialized and transformed (Ruth *et al.*, 1999; Sandikci and Omeraki, 2007; Kurt and Ozgen, 2013). Hirschman *et al.* (2011) state that sacred/profane contrast is common in every religious ritual, as shopping and material ownership is related with them. Additionally, while Muslim consumers are being conservative for their values and avant-garde in their consumption (Sandikci, 2011), their consumption in religious rituals still maintain its importance. Hence, Feast of Sacrifice includes buying a sacrificial animal, and there are marketplaces particularly established for this purpose, which represents a situation where both consumption and ritual behaviors are apparent. This study tries to understand circumstance of consumer who actively participate Feast of Sacrifice ritual by examining his/her practices before and during rituals and feelings toward his/her ritual experience.

Rook (1985) states that rituals differentiate from habits. Typically, rituals are habitual and plural experiences, while habits are more singular activities. Moreover, rituals follow distinctive scenarios and thus they differentiate from habits in this aspect. Ritual scripts have participants who assume distinct dramatic identities and those participants act out beginnings, middles and ends. Usually, the ritual experience is based on four particular components, which are ritual artifacts, ritual script, ritual performance role(s) and ritual audience.

The Feast of Sacrifice is a religious ritual that is subject to commercial ties by nature, as you need to buy a sacrificial animal and its economic impact is growing day by day. At the same time, the ritual is also characterized by actors exhibiting material characteristics such as sacrificial animals, marketplaces, payment instruments, animal slaughtering tools and expressive elements such as some ceremonies, religious rules, state regulations on hygiene and health, motivation to help the poor and needy. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that it could be thought of as a heterogeneous aggregate, namely, an assemblage.

Assemblage is a concept that goes back to French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984), and it is the mode of ordering heterogeneous entities in order for them to work together for a particular time (Müller, 2015, p. 28). Assemblage is a scalar, heterogeneous and dynamic concept. Moreover, it incorporates both the material and semiotic aspects (Roffe, 2016, pp. 43-44). First, the fact that an assemblage is a scalar concept means that it can be analyzed at any scale that goes beyond macro/micro dualism. For example, whether it is a practice or ritual, anything may be regarded as an assemblage. Secondly, the heterogeneity of an assemblage means that it is an aggregate of elements that differ in nature formed into a functional unit (Roffe, 2016, p. 43). Additionally, the fact that assemblage is in a constant process of change and is regularly subjected to transformation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 82) highlights that it is a dynamic concept. Finally, as an assemblage involves both spiritual discourses and material actors simultaneously, one could say that it incorporates both material and semiotic aspects.

This study is significant in that it focuses on buying experiences of consumers in Feast of Sacrifice in Turkey. This study has taken into account the unique situation of Turkey characterized into East and West, and secular and religious tensions that have created polarized and pluralized rituals and consumption patterns (Sandikci and Ger, 2005).

As an assemblage, Feast of Sacrifice rituals has many aspects to be explained regarding the four components of assemblage. The purpose of the present study is to explore the formation of consumer's consumption ritual parts and discourses associated with Feast of Sacrifice. Thus, we hope to be able to determine both human and non-human actors, which

are shaping consumer's experience of Qurban as well as shedding light on the heterogeneous nature of ritual. This paper contributes to the literature on consumer behavior in two main ways. First, we have shown that it is not possible to strictly separate mundane-sacred one from the other. The realms of holy and mundane can approach each other in a ritual. Ritual does not only belong to the sacred area as it includes both of them. Second, we can argue that ritual is an assemblage including components exhibiting both material and expressive, as a characteristic feature. Also, human and non-human elements in this assemblage contribute to forming ritual as well as consumer of the ritual, territorializing and deterritorializing them. In this research context, questions that guide our study are:

- Q1. What is the meaning of Qurban rituals to consumers in the marketplace?
- Q2. What experiences consumers derive from Qurban rituals?
- Q3. How can Qurban rituals be described, as an assemblage, regarding tetravalence of assemblage?

Following the introduction is an elaborated discussion of the theoretical background and ethnographic research methods that are used to investigate the consumer's consumption rituals of Feast of Sacrifice. An examination of key findings and implications for researchers and practitioners are also presented in the end.

Rituals, religion and assemblage

Rook (1985) notes that, despite the variety of ritual experiences, it may be classified according to the behavioral basis of rituals, and these common items can be observed among many different ritual types. One of the rich sources of the human ritual experience is the cosmological belief in systems of cultures. At this point, religion and ritual relativity have a significant influence on consumption actions.

Religion is an essential cultural variable, and it has considerable influence on the values, habits and attitudes of individuals (Delener, 1994). Religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping of social behavior. The differences in devotion to religious values not only have direct impact on individuals' lives but it also affects what they will consume and who will associate with it (Fam *et al.*, 2004). At this point, religion can provide a framework for making life understandable and accountable (Peterson and Roy, 1985). Religion affects consumption preferences as well as other institutions and social structures like gender, class and ethnicity (Sandikci and Ger, 2010). Park (2005) indicates that religious-symbolic marketplaces occurred, and many consumers have participated in these markets as spiritual seekers.

The role of religious rituals in consumption has been discussed in the study of a variety of marketing contexts, including Christmas (Pollay, 1986; Belk, 1989; Hirschman and LaBarbera, 1989; McKechnie and Tynan, 2006; Kurt and Ozgen, 2013), Thanksgiving Day (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1991), Valentine's Day (Close and Zinkhan, 2009), Ramadan (Sandikci and Omeraki, 2007; Touzani and Hirschman, 2008; Odabasi and Argan, 2009; Kurt and Ozgen, 2013) and Feast of Sacrifice (Kurt and Ozgen, 2013). While previous studies have focused on Ramadan consumption, only a limited number of research studies have examined Feast of Sacrifice. Likewise, we have only found a single study in marketing literature with a limited focus on Feast of Sacrifice (Kurt and Ozgen, 2013). Moreover, a review of current literature informs that most studies about religious rituals have been

conducted in the context of Western cultures and studies outside the scope of Western perceptions are very limited.

Sandikci and Omeraki's (2007) study investigated how consumer culture and globalization dynamics intersect with Islamic beliefs, rituals and behaviors, and how they are reviving and transforming social rituals to reconcile them with modern consumer-based lifestyles. According to the authors, commercialization of Ramadan and culture are not related to imperialism or postmodern irregularity. Instead, economic logic and consumer ideology have created new manifestations of existing rituals by combining Western and non-Western traditions and practices. The authors argue that the Ramadan festival is becoming increasingly secularized and more connected to marketing offerings.

According to Odabasi and Argan (2009), the essential dimension of Ramadan consumption is spiritual joy and pure pleasure. Later on, culture, influence, nostalgia and media come in order. Ramadan consumption shows its impact on impulse buying and the amount of spending.

Dealing with New Year, Ramadan and Prayer holidays, Hirschman *et al.* (2011) explores how Christian, Muslim and Jewish societies differ from dominant, minority and diaspora communities. The sacred-mundane opposition and conflict are subject to the ritual celebration of every religious festival. On Abrahamic religious holidays, connecting with religious brothers, renewing family ties and attaching more to religious orientations stand out as a common theme.

Considering that assemblage is a scalar concept (Roffe, 2016, p. 43), it can be put forward the fact that whereas elements such as globalization, religion, culture, and rituals all can be conceived as a heterogeneous assemblage, each of them may also shape consumption, being another assemblage. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), an assemblage has four distinct components; bodies, expression, territorial investment and abstract machine (deterritorialization). They called this structure as tetravalence of the assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The first component, bodies, comprises of all the heterogeneous bodily elements that partake in the assemblage. The second one, expression, consists of the set of spiritual transformation. The third component, territorial investment or territorialization, emphasizes the tendency of every assemblage to retain stability. The last one, abstract machine or deterritorialization, highlights the trend of every assemblage to break from structures within which it is embedded (Roffe, 2016, p. 50).

Deleuze and Guattari (1984) and De Landa (2006) state that social phenomena and institutions do not behave like a biological organism. As a part of human body, an arm has the only function of an arm or a leg is just functional as a leg. It is not possible to interchange these parts and have the same level functionality, but social institutions should not be accepted in this organic matter. Social facts, phenomenon or institutions constitute different assemblages with the parts which have different material and expressive roles. It is more like lego, but there is a significant difference about the pieces. In assemblages, elements may have fluctuant material and expressive roles that may change in every assemblage. Considering social phenomenon as assemblage rather than organism helps us to understand fluctuating material and expressive roles and their exterior relations with each other. In this manner, sociality is a generated, constructed meaning. Therefore, any piece that takes place in a social phenomenon has a meaning in its wholeness (assemblage). When the same piece is involved into a different social phenomenon, it may have another meaning or function. Territorialization, reterritorialization and deterritorialization are the concepts identifying these processes.

Feast of sacrifice as a religious ritual

Feast of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha) is a religious festival celebrated by Muslims worldwide as a commemoration of Ibrahim's (Abraham's) willingness to sacrifice his son Ismael for Allah. It is one of two Eid festivals that Muslims celebrate. Like Ramadan (Eid ul-Fitr), Feast of Sacrifice also begins with a short prayer followed by a sermon (Khutba). The celebrations continue with visits to friends and family, exchange of feasts and gifts (Najjar, 2005; Adna, 2014; Eid al-Adha, 2017).

In the Islamic lunar calendar, Feast of Sacrifice falls on the 10th day of Dhu al-Hijjah (The Month of the Pilgrimage) and lasts for four days until the 13th day. Dhu'l-Hijjah is the twelfth and final month of the Islamic calendar. It is a sacred month in the Islamic calendar like Ramadan, one in which the Hajj (pilgrimage) takes place as well as the Feast of Sacrifice. In the Gregorian calendar, the dates vary from year to year drifting approximately 11 days earlier each year (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1978; Noakes, 1992; Eid al-Adha, 2017).

Qurban is usually a word used for the sacrifice of a livestock animal. The word also applies to the festival in Turkey like "Qurban Festival." Those who can afford can slaughter an animal, like a camel, cattle or sheep/ram/goat, and share the meat with the needy during Feast of Sacrifice. The Qurban meat is then divided into three equal parts: One for the household, one for relatives and friends and one for the needy. The meat can go to anyone, even if one is not Muslim. A meal is then prepared with the sacrificial meat and offered to guests during the feast days (Jones, 2015, pp. 443-446).

Muslims buy, keep and slaughter their animal for the Feast of Sacrifice. Islamic rules also state that the animal must be an adult and in good health and shape. People visit small or big livestock markets (Qurban Market) to buy sacrificial animals for the Feast of Sacrifice in Muslim world (Adna, 2014; Eid al-Adha, 2016) (Figure 1).

Method

Data collection

As the purpose of the present study is to explore the formation of consumer's consumption ritual parts and discourses associated with Feast of Sacrifice, we used qualitative ethnographic research design for our study. We had two different data collection tools which are in-depth interviews and field notes. We conducted four ethnographic participant observations in animal marketplace established for Feast of Sacrifice in four different cities (Çanakkale, Kocaeli, Konya and Sakarya) which are selected due to proximity to researchers and 17 in-depth interviews with buyers. Three of the researchers had visited the animal marketplaces for participant observation and organizing the interviews. After spending some time to get used to the context, researchers ask consumers to be participator of in-depth interviews. Consumers who volunteered were welcomed to the café of marketplace and 13 of interviews were conducted there. However, we could not contact any women buyers there and realized not all of the ritual participators visit the marketplace, we

Figure 1.
People visiting
livestock market to
buy sacrificial
animals for the Feast
of Sacrifice in
Konya, Turkey



conducted four interviews (2 women and 2 men) at participants' houses. Despite the various actors in Feast of Sacrifice (buyers, sellers, resellers, etc.), we focused on consumer experiences and collected data only from buyers. The interview participants consisted of two women and fifteen men, a total of 17 people and their duration ranged from 30 to 90 min in length. Our informants were primarily between the ages of 28 and 67. We determine a criterion for sampling which is experiencing Qurban ritual in some level. The participants were selected with purposeful sampling technique (Miles and Huberman, 1994), as the main objective of sampling strategy is to yield cases that are information rich (Patton, 2002). It should be noted here that the male bias in the data set is inconsistent with previous research and theory on gender roles and shopping. Different studies have indicated that shopping (Gainer and Fischer, 1991; Otnes and McGrath, 2001; Lowrey and Otnes, 2004) and especially Ramadan shopping (Kurt and Ozgen, 2013) is viewed as women's work. In contrast, men go to marketplace for selecting Qurban, and other actors in this buyer-seller relationship process are generally men (Table I).

Data and methods of analysis

The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and then used for qualitative content analysis (Scherier, 2014). After the transcription of the data (20 pages of field notes and 200 pages of interview transcripts), we conducted inductive *in vivo* coding, which uses participants' own words, phrases and language in code formation (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). To have inter-coder reliability, the codes developed by the researchers were compared and cross-checked (Yin, 2009). Besides, throughout coding, codes and data were continuously compared. Short notes were written about the definitions of codes and codes were used not to experience any change in the definitions of codes and to prevent meaningful changes (Gibbs, 2008). Next, the categories and themes identified were discussed among the authors, and any disagreements present were resolved. The themes were refined until authors were satisfied that they are well captured in the quotes (Spiggle, 1994). To provide validity in the research (Creswell, 2013), we used experienced external auditor who is expert in qualitative research methods. As all the researchers are experienced Qurban ritual participants, they are aware

Participants	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Marital status	Occupation	Qurban choice (Ovine or Bovine)
1	Mahir	Male	54	Married	Retired	Bovine
2	Abdi	Male	47	Married	White collar	Ovine
3	Selahaddin	Male	44	Married	Academic	Ovine
4	Emir	Male	33	Married	Blue collar	Bovine
5	Salih	Male	47	Married	Self-employment	Bovine
6	Enes	Male	46	Married	Blue collar	Bovine
7	Beyza	Female	59	Widow	Housewife	Bovine
8	Mehmet Ali	Male	40	Married	White collar	Bovine
9	Tahir	Male	39	Married	Teacher	Bovine
10	Yusuf	Male	35	Married	Self-employment	Bovine
11	Muhittin	Male	28	Single	Academic	Ovine
12	Ahmet	Male	36	Married	Self-employment	Bovine
13	Koray	Male	40	Married	Blue collar	Ovine
14	Ziya	Male	65	Married	Academic	Ovine
15	Yunus	Male	25	Single	Academic	Ovine
16	Sümevra	Female	58	Widow	Housewife	Ovine
17	İsmail	Male	67	Married	Retired	Ovine

Table I.
Participants of research

of the context and the ritual. They are appropriate to understand little nuances, non-verbal communications and connotations.

As Qurban ritual reveals the interaction of human and non-human, material and expressive components, we approached the data from assemblage theory perspective (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; De Landa, 2006). The organizing theme that integrated our interpretation was the parts of the consumer's experiences of Qurban ritual.

Findings

Seven themes emerged from our analysis: meaning of Qurban, preparation of the ritual, Qurban choice, meat, Qurban ritual, marketplace, framing discourses.

Theme 1: meaning of Qurban

There are two categories of the meaning of "Qurban" which are religious and non-religious meanings. This segregation should not be considered as accurate discrimination between meanings as *tradition* plays an important territorialization role between these meanings. So, with traditions, some non-religious meanings perceived as religious or some religious one as non-religious. That is why tradition has a formalizing role in meanings. Whereas religious implications include concepts such as religious duty, peace, spiritual satisfaction, purification from sin, some non-religious meaning emphasizes, with a critical manner, conspicuousness and social acceptance. Salih, Ahmet and Enes who identify Qurban ritual as religious service state this as follows, whereas Yunus accept Qurban ritual more like a fun day:

In a time of Feast of Sacrifice, we sacrifice our animals (Qurban) for Allah. Afterwards, we share and eat with spouse, friends, and relatives. It is a religious duty, a need [...]. We are trying to carry out this. (Salih).

Since the Feast of the Sacrifice is primarily a religious obligation, we, the Muslims, have to sacrifice one of the animals we bought from the market (Ahmet).

Feast of Sacrifice is one of the duties we have in our religion, Islam. Sacrifice an animal for Allah is fardh (religious obligation). It needs to be done.(Enes).

The first day of sacrifice was like a different version of a fun picnic day (Yunus).

This critical approach could be seen as a kind of process of deterritorialization. Given that deterritorialization highlights the tendency of every assemblage to break from structures within which it is embedded (Roffe, 2016, p. 50), slaughtering an animal for conspicuousness instead of God (Allah) may be regarded as breaking from the primary goal of Qurban. But, at this stage, it is also possible to talk about a reterritorialization process. Mahir and Enes approach this situation as follows:

People often see it (Qurban) as something like [...] they feel a sense of necessity. That is why everyone saw each other at work and said, "He has sacrificed. I am also going to". (Mahir)

Because, when you don't sacrifice that year, you feel like lowly (Enes).

Despite some critical non-religious meaning, *tradition* succeeds in preserving the context through some non-religious but non-critical meaning such as gathering, solidarity, feast, ritual and nostalgia. Another participant (Selahaddin) expresses that the sacrifice ritual is regarded as a habit and tradition as follows:

For me maybe, it is a habit, maybe it could have turned into a tradition. I mean, rather than the cause of religion, why are we performing this? Every year, this needs to be done. People say “we have seen this way and it should go on like this.” (Selahaddin)

Theme 2: preparation of the ritual

Preparation of Qurban ritual has four folds (partner search, examination of the economic situation, preparation to shop and Qurban choice) and in addition to these, Qurban choice is also part of the preparation, yet it has detailed processes and actors that is why we choose it as a theme.

As it is once in a year feast, consumers try to get ready for this ritual. As a part of this preparation, they examine where to buy the animals, how to find better animals and examine their financial situation. These actions can be accepted as preparation to shop. Koray and Abdi explain how they get ready to shop as follows:

Before the feast, like before 3 or 4 days, this vibe begins among people. Neighbors, friends, colleagues start asking questions like; “Have you seen the animals, what are you going to buy (ovine or bovine), what are you going to sacrifice?” (Koray)

Research on price is always on. More or less, everybody who is going to sacrifice communicate with each other. They share something like, “I bought it with this price.” Besides, nowadays, there is also a live sale by the weight of ovine and bovine. I mean you would have some ideas about prices. (Abdi)

The man who did this for the sake of Allah did not only choose the animal for financial reasons. It is not like normal-time shopping. Even it is expensive, he goes and buy. (Ismail)

Consumers who are going to slaughter a sacrificial animal during the Feast of Sacrifice check for the available partner/s before the Feast time arrived. For consumers, it is important to have partners that they trust. Since there is a sharing process of meat, they do not want any violation of share:

[. . .] I slaughter with the people whom I trust, and I am sure that there won't be any problem with sharing the meat and there won't be any violation of share. But if I don't find enough people, instead of slaughtering with strangers, I would do it by myself. (Mehmet Ali)

Consumers also examine their economic situation, which decides whether to buy or not to buy a sacrificial animal. One of our participants (Beyza) mentioned this preparation as follows:

Some say just before the Feast “I am not ready to buy an animal, I don't have money.” I don't do like this. I get ready for it before the Feast because I know when it comes, I will need money. (Beyza)

Theme 3: Qurban choice

Qurban choice is big part of the preparation of ritual theme mentioned above, and also it is a part of the ritual itself. The decision is formed by three factors; which are the animals, buyer and seller. On choosing Qurban ovine or bovine, people have several motivations, which are financial opportunity, choosing less tiring practice, harmony among partners, the choice about taste (meat), whether finding partners, religious motivations leading the choice, cultural preference, risk aversion, distributing more meat. Therefore, we can admit that both human actors like the buyer, seller and non-human actors such as ovine and bovine animals have an agency on one of the essential parts of the ritual, especially choosing Qurban.

The choice of sacrificial animals can also determine whether the consumer will go to the Qurban Pazar or the farms. In some cases, the consumer determines whether to buy ovine or bovine as sacrificial animal according to the circumstances of the time. Abdi conveys his views on this issue as follows:

If I am going to buy sheep or ram, I will go to Qurban Pazar. When it is cattle, I will go to my friend's farm to choose. I have two or three friends who have cattle farm. When Qurban time arrived, I contact them and decide to buy from one of them (Abdi).

On Qurban choice, the taste of an individual on meat rise into prominence. In addition to this, serving Qurban meat to the guests and sharing it with the needy cause the owner of Qurban to pay more attention to his/her choice. This is an indication that the social environment of the individual has shaped his/her sacrificial choice and consumption. Salih and Muhittin choose different types of animal as a sacrifice, and both justify their choices by taste. Further, Muhittin states that his choice also arises from a tradition:

We prefer sacrificing cattle more. The meat is beautiful; the food is beautiful. Since this kind of meat has a lower level of fat, we share it with relatives, friends, and neighbors with inner peace. (Salih)

I prefer small cattle like sheep or goat. If you ask me why I would say tradition [. . .]. In our region, I mean in my hometown, sheep and goat are more preferred. An also, meat of these animals are much more delicious. (Muhittin)

Apart from the feast of sacrifice, almost all of the consumers do not buy cattle or small cattle directly from an animal market or a farm. They buy meat in smaller quantities from local butchers and supermarkets. Notably, the consumer of modern urban life who has limited ties with rural areas is an important cause of this choice. However, it is necessary to resort to expert opinion in the selection of sacrificial animals. Generally, consumers consult with those who have knowledge of animals in their immediate surroundings and prefer to have one or a few of the partners who understand the animal selection. As Qurban ritual is a form of religious duty, choosing the best animal within the financial possibility of the buyer is the primary consideration during the Qurban choice. One of the research participants, Yusuf consults the people in immediate surroundings in selecting the animal, and he wishes to have someone who knows about animals and would buy his Qurban for him:

Those who know about animals, our friends, our senior members of the family, we asked for their help. They do research and buy our Qurban for us. What do we do in this process? Just say "I accept, this is my Qurban and May Allah also accept my sacrifice" (smiling). (Yusuf)

Selecting an animal as Qurban is usually a process in which men play more active roles. The different actors in the process are mostly male, and the traditional practice causes the man to carry out this process. Women prefer to have someone close to them carry out this job because the process involves different actions ranging from the selection of the sacrificial animal until the day of the festivity and coming home with Qurban meat. Sumeyra and Beyza express this situation as follows:

My son or son-in-law deal with the animal, because I am not available to go to the bazaar and bargain for the animal as I am woman. If I do not have a son or son-in-law around, my brother will help me. (Sumeyra)

I am giving the procuration to my son or my deceased husband's brother. They go, have the work done and bring me the meat. I accept that. I agree on the share. (Beyza)

Theme 4: meat

Meat and Qurban meat are not same. Meat from Qurban animal is considered holy/sacred which seems reasonable as it is coming from religious ritual. Nevertheless, some situations make meat more or less sacred. For example, putting Qurban meat to deep freezing has deterritorialization effect and giving more percentage of meat to the poor has territorialization effect of Qurban meat being sacred. Selahaddin, explains this situation of deterritorialization as below:

I'm in favor of consuming the Qurban in 4 days. So, it should be ovine. I'm not in favor of left it behind, roasting and keeping it in the deep freeze to consume later. I am in favor of consuming the meat at that moment, namely in a period of the feast. (Selahaddin)

It is evident that Selahaddin meant a process of deterritorialization even if he did not say it directly. Selahaddin considers that to consume later, keeping the meat in the deep freezer is contradicting with the essence of Qurban worship consisting of helping poor and needy people and approaching Allah. Thus, we can say that deep freeze as a non-human material may transform the identity of Qurban.

However, we need to pay more attention on instantaneously transformation of meat from ordinary to sacred. This transformation could be viewed as incorporeally changing. This situation may remind the reader of Deleuze and Guattari's famous plane hijacking example. "In an airplane hijacking, the threat of a hijacker brandishing a revolver is obviously an action [. . .]. But the transformation of the passenger into hostages [. . .] is an instantaneous incorporeal transformation" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 81). When an ordinary animal is slaughtered for God's sake in the sacrificial feast period, it goes through incorporeal changes, as does it in Deleuze and Guattari's plane. This immaterial change is critical regarding emphasizing the expression orientation of the assemblage. Enes conveyed how the meat was consumed as follows:

When you come to the home with meat, allocation begins. But first, you cook roasted meat and then eat it with your family. Then, you prepare shares to deliver those who don't have Qurban in their home. Afterwards, you work on the meat and separate it for mincing, roasting, etc. You put them to deep-freezer or refrigerator to eat it later. (Enes)

Feast of sacrifice is not considered separate from the meat of the sacrificed animal. Sacrificial animals and consumed meat are elements that complement the feast. It is part of the ritual that the slaughtered animal's meat is consumed at the time of the feast. Participants say that the festival is not sufficiently experienced in a house where the meat of the sacrificed animal is not consumed:

To me, Feast without meat is not feast at all. I mean both are integrated. If you don't have Qurban in your house, then you don't have your feast as well. My point of view is that [. . .] (Selahaddin)

One year, we couldn't make it (slaughter an animal), that year we felt very sad. It was hard. You feel the void inside. (Salih)

The consumption of sacrifice is so taken for granted to consumers that they think it is more delicious than the meat that is eaten at other times. Moreover, Muhittin believes that this taste difference in a positive way is a tool of motivation to practice the ritual:

Honestly, Qurban meat is more delicious than meat we eat normal times (smiling). This could be the motivation for me. (Muhittin)

Theme 5: Qurban ritual

As a part of Qurban ritual, donation presents controversial discourses as perceiving it as an alternative to Qurban. Donation here represents the behavior of giving money to charitable organizations to slaughter an animal for donors with their procuration. Qurban ritual has a central role in Qurban which means that it is related to everything and these relations are complicated but for the physical situation of the ritual; attitudes toward donation, participation and slaughtering are the significant indications. Participants of our research indicate that the beginning of feast is slaughtering the animal. This shows us that, the sacrificial animal has an agency role in the ritual as a non-human actor.

When Qurban hadn't arrived at home, you felt like there is no Feast of Sacrifice yet. It is like, it hasn't begun yet [...] I donate one year, for example. The foundation even sent me 5 kilos of meat. But I don't feel like Feast because I don't see the animal, meat or anything. (Selahaddin)

There are different ideas regarding the participation in slaughtering of the sacrificial animal. Some consumers are involved in slaughtering process individually and directly, and some ask for professional assistance and give the procuration to the professionals:

We slaughtered our animal by ourselves. Sometimes, we went to slaughterhouse and bought the service. But I would say, rather than the slaughterhouse, we are more satisfied when we do the job. Because, as I said so, I reach Allah's mercy by suffering trouble, hopefully. (Yusuf)

The rules that the state has recently taken into account regarding health and cleanliness cause individuals to prefer modern slaughtering places and to benefit from professional support:

Well, we had gardens, back then. In our gardens, we gather with our partners, or if we bought sheep individually, we slaughter our Qurban. Afterwards, public officials decide to ban this practice since they thought scenery with blood, meat, and bones everywhere, and the smell is disturbing. They show people places to make this slaughtering work [...]. Experts or butchers also do this job for us. We then took our share. (Emir)

In today's urban life, a situation occurs in which it is not possible to slaughter the sacrificial animal traditionally at home. But the consumer wants to participate in this form of ritual, which is worship at the same time. However, slaughtering needs certain skills. Especially for cattle, it is difficult to manage all slaughtering process carefully and efficiently. That is why consumers increasingly go to ranches and farms where they can both see all the slaughtering process and make this job done by giving the procuration. In this way the owner of the Qurban who is a consumer can also participate in the ritual partially. A hybrid process is on. There is a modernizing market structure while the traditional pattern is still preceded (Belk, 2010; Scaraboto, 2015). We have witnessed a group of partners who have slaughtered the animal together and will share the meat. One of the participants explain this as follows:

For a long time, we have been figuring out this by going to farms. We are not able to do the job by ourselves. We fear to make something wrong. For example, I don't want to torture the animal by doing something wrong. That is why I go to farms. There are butchers; they are professionals. When we go farms, we buy our animals from there. You go to the barn, see the animals. They also provide slaughtering. In this way, we practice the cleanest and safest way. (Mehmet Ali)

Theme 6: marketplace

The marketplace of Qurban has three actors who are buyers, sellers and mediators. Buyers and sellers meet in the market and facilitators help these parts to negotiate. We can assume all mediators have territorialization and deterritorialization effects on this buyer-seller

relationship. Also, in field notes, we observed that purchased animals had been transferred to the trucks to carry them away. In Qurban market, some sellers sell tools such as knives, ropes and cutting machines which are used in the slaughtering of animals. On the other hand, some sellers serve simple foods such as toast and pancakes; tea, coffee and soft drinks, and the traveling buffets are usually selling fast foods in the marketplace. As field notes manifest, the market is an assemblage including ephemeral and emergent characteristics (Lury, 2009) (Figure 2).

The sacrificial animal market is established in many provinces and cities of the country once in the year (before 20 to 30 days to Feast of Sacrifice). The market is settled for a few weeks, and the sellers from different regions of the country come together to try to sell their animals. Consumers visit this market a few times until the first day of the feast. The reason for visiting the market several times is to conduct price research and buy sacrificial animals at the best price. Ahmet and Tahir express their experiences on price research as follow:



Figure 2.
The various actors in
the marketplace and
the structure of the
market

You go there, look to animal and ask the prices. In the beginning, when the market had just established, we saw prices are very high. Then in our second visit, we see that prices became normal. An also I heard that, when the seller couldn't sell, prices go down. In the morning of the Feast, you can find more reasonable prices. (Ahmet)

The last day the market, I mean the first day of the Feast, we went to market. We bought maybe the prettiest rams with half-price. Perhaps one-third of the price, I don't know. That was very interesting for me. But still, waiting for the last day is a risky decision. (Tahir)

Individuals who see the marketplace as an area of socialization and want to have this experience, as they see this experience as a part of the ritual. The Qurban market is held only once a year, and the uniqueness of this experience explains the consumer's interest to market:

It is interesting, fascinating event. It is different. You need to experience it. I go there; I feel the excitement. I live the moment of being there. I find it very amusing. Every feast, I bring my children with me, also. My eldest to youngest, I gather them all and go to market. (Koray)

Consumers who think that Qurban markets have contributed to the country's economy prefer to buy sacrificial animals from these markets, rather than local farms:

[...] Mostly, we prefer Qurban markets. Because Qurban markets are important. We have cattle and farm owners from all around the country, especially Eastern parts. They bring their animals here with the hope of going back to hometowns with money, so they can be able to go on in this business. They need to be happy with this business. If they don't be satisfied, then they will not bring animals or just leave the business. We need to help this circulation go on. I believe in this. That is why I choose to buy from markets. (Yusuf)

Theme 7: framing discourses

Practicing Qurban rituals framed by many different discourses but economic impact, negative experiences, objection to animal lover discourse and transferring meaning to children are the prominent ones. With a negative experience, people change their sellers right away but never give up on slaughtering and practicing Qurban ritual. People justify their behaviors with all these discourses.

One of the criticisms brought to the Feast of the Sacrifice is the massacre of animals, which is generally seen on social media time to time in a provocative way. In response, the consumers express that the festival is celebrated once a year and that much more animals are consumed during the year, and they are trying to reveal the invalidity of this discourses:

Recently, some say 'Feast of the Sacrifice, animal massacre!' it must not be believed. Because, as I said, Feast of Sacrifice is only four days, once a year. Apart from this meat is being consumed in this country or this world. You have to think like that. (Emir)

Another form of discourse is about the transfer of the sacrificial ritual to later generations. The consumer, who sees this ritual as a transmission of a tradition rather than a traumatic situation, contradicts the negative discourse on this side:

They say traumatization of children, etc. My whole childhood involved seeing the slaughtering of the sacrificed animal, but I don't end up as a psychopath. Even, I haven't had any trauma. Back then we were happy to be part of the Feast. (Ziya)

Discussion and implications

Qurban ritual experienced by Turkish consumers is shaped by several discourses and practices. To show the process of how consumer experiences the ritual we draw the ritual

process as follows. According to process, we figure out that consumers prepare for the ritual before ritual time. While they are preparing, they look for partners, review their financial situation and they do some shopping for the ritual such as buying required equipment and so. The preparation stage may differ from other purchasing with full of economic consideration. People try to buy sacrificial animal even they struggle economically. During the preparation stage, they also visit marketplace or animal farms to feel the pulse of the market. It is not only a regular visit but also exciting and joyful trips. Due to their past experiences with the sellers, they build up their relationships. They decide buying whether ovine or bovine. They also need information on physical characteristics, origin of animal and price to choose their animal. All the efforts in this stage are about choosing the best animal to sacrifice. When they decide on the animal, they wait for the Eid of Adha day to perform the ritual. During the ritual every participant has a role. On the other hand, some of the consumers choose to donate his/her Qurban and do not deal with the requirements of slaughtering ritual. Different level of participation may occur at that stage. After obtaining the meat from the animal which will be discussed further, they give it away to friends, family and the poor. Consumer experience of Qurban ritual occurs with these stages, while it is framed by two different prominent structures. These are framing discourses and meaning of Qurban. Qurban's economic contribution, negative experiences toward slaughtering, transferring the tradition to children and objection animal lovers' discourse are framing discourses. People who participate the ritual create their ritual identity toward these constructs. Meaning of Qurban has also role on the ritual. Both religious and non-religious meanings attained to Qurban make participants' level of participation and their point of view for the experience process (Figure 3).

This study shows that a social theory (assemblage theory), which was first introduced by [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#) and shaped by the contributions of [De Landa \(2006\)](#), can also be used in the context of consumer culture. This study also presents that assemblage theory which has been used before in the studies of consumer culture ([Roffe, 2016](#)) can also be considered in the context of the rituals which contains both profane and sacred items. However, it provides a theoretical development in which it shows that the assemblage

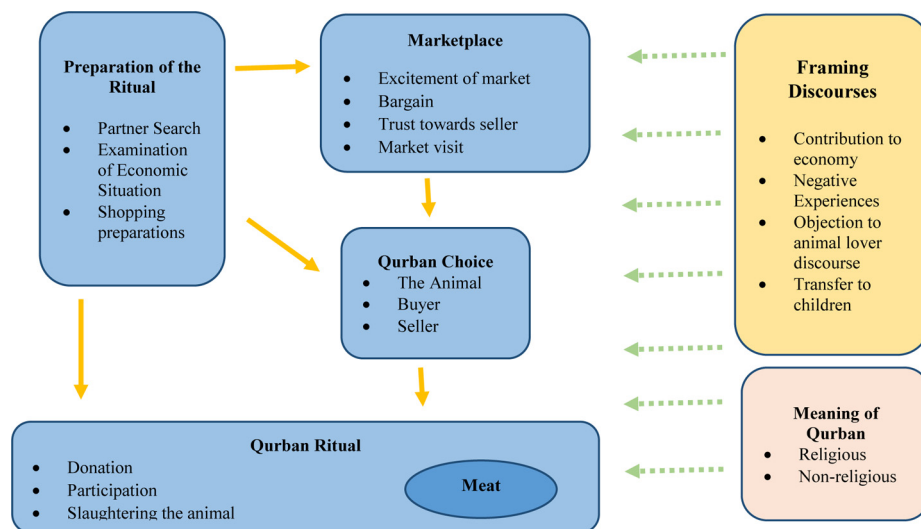


Figure 3. Turkish consumer experience of Qurban rituals

theory can also be used in the context of a religious ritual such as the Feast of Sacrifice. Another theoretical contribution of the study is implementation of assemblage theory, which suggests the parts forming the social phenomena include different meanings and functions in different assemblages to the ritual, which has a structure with a particular process, role and content scenario. This shows that even the most structured social phenomena like religious rituals may be accepted as social assemblage where every individual experience his/her own ritual with the parts that have constantly changing material and expressive roles.

Typically, the ritual refers to a situation in which the ritual takes place at an unusual moment and in which the roles of the participants are defined and the material used has a certain meaning. But the meat at the Feast of Sacrifice is not same as the meat bought from butcher during the rest of the year. We think that this is an important contribution to ritual literature. Different identities experience different consumer cultures, and this occurs even in a religious ritual. It is possible to explain this noncompliance with assemblage theory.

First, the meat from Feast of Sacrifice and meat bought from the butcher during the rest of the year are not same. Latter is not considered sacred, but when people have meat from the Feast of Sacrifice, they accept this meat holy at some level. When we think Feast of Sacrifice ritual as an assemblage, we see that meat, as a non-human actor is part of this assemblage with unique material and expressive role. Its expressive role is regarded as more sacred and material role is related to getting it from the sacrificial animal. Meat is territorialized in Feast of Sacrifice assemblage and gains its more sacred meaning by being a part of this assemblage. However, meat apart from the ritual assemblage, it has its food meaning when it is served in the restaurant. There is another significant issue with the meat from Feast of Sacrifice. According to the practice of believers and rules/suggestions from Islam, meat gathered during the Feast is divided into three parts. The first portion is for eating with family second is for serving the guests, and the last one is for sharing with the needy. So, not all meat is consumed at once. There is some meat left during the Feast, and this meat is generally stored in the refrigerator to eat or serve it later. Storing the meat gathered from the Feast in freezer deterritorialize the sacred meaning of meat. When it is stored in freezer for a while and taken out to cook, it turns out that it is normal meat which may have been bought from any butcher or supermarket. So sacred meat had a reterritorialization and went back to its old and established meaning.

Theoretically, the findings of this study show that Qurban experience is unique consumption ritual in consumer behavior. We should underline that it is not possible to strictly separate mundane-sacred each other. The realms of holy and mundane can approach each other in a ritual. Ritual does not only belong to the sacred area, as it includes both of them. Moreover, we can argue that ritual is an assemblage including components exhibiting both material and expressive a characteristic. As [Canniford and Shankar \(2013\)](#) proposed about experience of nature, experience of Qurban includes both expressive discourses (religious rules, objection to animal lover discourse) and material elements such as technology (credit card as a payment instrument) and material geographies (traditional animal marketplace, animal farms, shopping mall as markets). Also, human and non-human elements in this assemblage contribute forming ritual as well as consumer of the ritual territorialize and deterritorialize those assemblages.

[Scaraboto \(2015\)](#) and [Belk \(2010\)](#) mention the existence of a hybrid structure in today's markets and the presence of a different mechanism of exchange. In this market structure, it is possible to observe a different market format that includes the modern market system as well as the continuation of the traditional pattern. In his seminal study explaining the social change in Turkey, [Mardin \(1994\)](#) states that Turkish modernization is a fictionalized one. He

adds that society does not break with religious beliefs and rituals, but these rituals are changing their form and continuing their existence in sociality. In this sense, it could be advocated that Feast of Sacrifice ritual changes its forms and maintain its existence in Turkish society.

Delener (1994) stated that, religion is an essential cultural variable, and it has a significant influence on the values, habits and attitudes of individuals, and our findings support this statement. However, there is one important point that deserves a more detailed examination here. Put differently, we should be aware not to overlook the fact that while religious discourses are shaping consumption, at the same time consumption practices (re) produce religious discourses. The heterogeneous structure of ritual, as an assemblage, allows the actors to justify their actions regarding ritual suitability. For example, one of our informant who prefers ovine to bovine explains this choice by reminding us that animal sent to Prophet Abraham by God was ovine. On the other hand, another informant stated that he slaughters bovine since a Hadith is saying that slaughtering bovine is better.

Territorialization and deterritorialization process are the contextual dimension of an assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). As we are speaking about Qurban as an assemblage, it should be noted that both human and non-human actors territorialize, deterritorialize and even reterritorialize this assemblage. For example, whereas religious meanings include concepts such as religious duty, peace, spiritual satisfaction, purification from sin are territorialize Qurban ritual, reinforcing and fixing its identity; some informants mention that slaughtering an animal for conspicuousness instead of the sake of God may be regarded as breaking from the primary goal of Qurban. In other words, some motivations (e.g. conspicuous consumption) contrary to the essential meaning of the Qurban deterritorialize it.

The study has some potential contributions to consumption studies. This study contributes to the literature on religious rituals and practices because of viewing ritual as an assemblage including material and expressive features as well as human and non-human actors. Besides, we can argue that there is not a constant consumer and ritual concept. As Lury (2009) states, the consumer is ephemeral and emergent. A consumer becomes the consumer while he/she is consuming. Qurban ritual is not an exception. Consumers become participants in the ritual while they are dealing with jobs relating to ritual.

There are also some practical contributions that our study provides. The prominent practical contribution is that consumers are not choosing one method of Qurban shopping. Beside Qurban market, animal farms selling cattle or Qurban share (1/7 of cattle) and supermarkets selling livestock are emerging market actors which provide alternatives for consumers. Turkey as an emerging market offers opportunities to potential investors that even in a sacrificial ritual, there are evolving and modernizing consumer-market interactions are on rise. Potential traders should consider that consumers of sacrificial animal may buy it from farm or supermarket instead of animal market. Payment systems also diversify from cash payment to credit card. Ease of payment or paying with credit card assure consumers to participate even they do not have enough money on hand. Potential sellers of this market may create their marketing propositions that meet consumers' need and wants effectively if they are aware of these different trends on payment methods and purchasing units. Finally, nonprofit organizations which organize sacrificing animal operations both at local and international level may have leverage to collect new resources from new donors. By being part of Qurban ritual as mediator, they can improve their markets.

Limitations and future research

Like all studies, there are limitations in this research as well. This research is discussed in a single geography, with the participants of Qurban ritual in Turkey only. It is likely that this

situation would change when studies are conducted in other cultures both in Muslim majority and minority countries. The second limitation is we only looked at consumer experiences. There are several actors in Qurban rituals, such as sellers, resellers, non-profit organizations and public institutions. For further researches, it needs to add other actors to the research to understand Qurban ritual in a more holistic and integrated way. Furthermore, in this study, we did not focus on consumer typologies that are directly involved in the ritual, but clues were obtained that would allow for further research.

Despite these limitations, this study presents useful findings for both researchers and practitioners. As there is a considerable consumer mass participating the Qurban ritual, a more detailed examination of this market is required. Significant contributions could be made through observing the effect of modernization on the traditional market structure and explaining the dimensions of change. Finally, transforming structure of religious ritual consumption could be a future direction for researchers. We touch on sustaining consumer behaviors which involve religious rituals as an inured part of tradition and/or culture. However, there is transforming context, behaviors and actors in religious ritual consumption, and the factors affecting or shaping this alteration is worth to examine further.

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